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ABSTRACT

The literature affecting the growing profession of student development can be broken down into three basic forms: text books and text/practitioner books; refereed and non-refereed journals; and monographs and Jossey-Bass New Direction Series paperbacks. These printed materials are directed to and serve a very disparate audience of about 50,000 student affairs workers. Journal articles about student development can be categorized into experimental analytical literature; descriptive literature; and philosophical/essay articles. Contemporary texts and practitioner books can be characterized as possessing chapters on the history of student affairs, inclusive of the student development starting in the 1970s; chapters on various human development theories such as are deemed appropriate to college students; chapters on infusing student development theory into the workplace; chapters on legal relationships and discipline as related to developmental outcomes, chapters on assessment and evaluation of developmental programs and activities; and a smattering of chapters on administrative theory, administration, staffing, staff development, ethical behavior, and challenges or unresolved problems facing the profession. Student development will continue to be outside the mainstream until the field is resuscitated with a healthy sense of realism. (ABL)

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CRITIQUE OF STUDENT DEVELOPMENT LITERATURE

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For purposes of this analysis it is important to establish a professional context against and within which we examine the population being served by the creators and publishers of our literature. As well, I believe that it is important to keep in mind that ideally, our literature is intended to describe as well as affect positively the nature of practice and the manner in which practice aids society, institutions, and students in achieving their educational and citizenship goals. With this preamble in mind, I will proceed.

THE LITERATURE

The literature affecting our growing profession can be broken down into three basic forms:

1) Text Books & Text/Practitioner Books
2) Refereed & Non-Refereed Journals
3) Monographs and Jossey-Bass New Direction Series Paperbacks

These printed materials are directed to and serve a very disparate audience of about 50,000 student affairs workers or about 14 per institution, serving approximately 3,500 colleges and universities and 13.5 million college students. Of these 13.5 million students, over 40% are adult learners and 83% are commuter or off-campus, leaving but 17% who are 18-22 years old, attending full time, and classified as traditional students.

No one knows with any degree of accuracy who are student affairs professionals are in terms of academic credentials, years of service, route of entry, level of sophistication, or membership in professional organizations representing student affairs at the local, state, regional or national levels. But, for the purposes of this exercise, we can reasonably speculate that 3/6ths possess only the BS or BA degree; 1/6th the MA degree in student affairs or a related area; 1/6th the MA degree in an unrelated area; and 1/6th holding the Specialist, EdD or PhD or Law degree. Generously, we could speculate that <u>possibly</u> and at most, 1/5th or approximately 8,333 of our practitioners have had some direct or related academic preparation in student affairs work (an average of 2.3 professionally prepared staff members per institution).

Among the total population , we experience turnover and/or loss of approximately 26-27% of our middle management staff per year (Blum, 1989) whose numbers far exceed the less than one thousand graduates with Master's degrees in student affairs who enter the field each year, and of whom we lose anywhere from 32-39% within their first five to six years in the field (Burns, 1982;

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Evans, 1988). A simple conversion of these figures reveals that 12,000 student affairs workers are, for the most part, leaving us each year or two and being replaced by mostly people without student affairs professional preparation.

Of the approximately 50,000 student affairs workers, we know that no more than 13,000 hold membership (including dual memberships) in one of our three major associations: ACPA, NASPA, NAWDAC. As well, we are reasonably sure that of these 13,000 members, fewer than one-third will ever attend a national professional conference, and probably not more than 3/5ths will read their journals or purchase a student affairs textbook or monograph for study.

A number of studies have been conducted on the academic backgrounds of students entering and graduating from professional preparation programs. And, although such data are inconsistent, we can generalize or safely presume that of the approximately 1,000 entering MA or MS students each year, well over a half of them have no background of substance in any of the behavioral sciences (psychology, sociology, anthropology), maybe 1/4th or less have a background in education, and the majority come to us with majors in sciences, social sciences and humanities and ranging from astrophysics to packaging science. Please keep in mind that student development, as currently perceived by many in our field, is contingent upon practitioners knowledge, skills and competencies as applied behavioral scientists, not as applied educators.

I believe that this has been a reasonably fair estimate of the basic nature of the audience to whom our professional literature is directed. And, it is from the perspective of these typical student affairs practitioners that I examined the literature.

As we are pressed for time, I will limit my examination of our developmental literature to two basic forms: text books and text/practitioner books, and refereed journals, as such as directed to the audience just described.

Journal articles about student development can, generally, be categorized into four groups:

1. Experimental analytical literature which describes populations, programs, activities and treatments, which attempts to determine causal relationships, and which attempts to develop an understanding of changes in populations. Some such literature attempts to derive further questions or hypotheses to be tested.

2. Descriptive literature which concentrates upon describing program development and its execution, and is of an instructional nature.

3. Philosophical/essay articles which usually explore philosophical and pragmatic concerns of practitioners through reliance upon a breadth of experience and knowledge of the field's historical past, practices and precedents.

The experimental-analytical and quazi-experimental statistically driven articles are, with rare exception, directed, co-authored or written by a

faculty member and/or doctoral student milking his or her dissertation for a juried journal publication. Such reports about success, partial success, or failure to show causal relationships between the application of developmental growth or change in undergraduate students, most often, are so clouded by cautionary statements, short treatment periods, restrictive conditions such as sample size, non-generalizability, and disclaimers, as to render the findings relatively valueless to the typical practitioner. As well, most such articles are so permeated with highly sophisticated statistics as to render their presentation and understanding unintelligible to the typical practitioner or graduate student, who, if at all, never got beyond analysis of variance.

Such literature, we just agree, is (1) needed for building a body of knowledge necessary for proving the efficacy of theory, (2) necessary for teaching theory in practice, and (3) of value and mostly understandable to other researchers who share such skills and interests. However, we are inclined to agree that such literature (1) possesses little relevant utility to the typical BA or MA level practitioner who, if he or she could understand it, would be hard-pressed to apply the findings to his or her immediate work situation, and (2) is mostly ignored by non-researchers. In short, whatever their merits in advancing understanding of theory and/or practice, and regardless of their utility in advancing the researcher's career in academia, such literature falls mostly on deaf ears in the student's and practitioner's world.

The descriptive and descriptive-analytical literature found in our journals, although presented in a more understandable manner, tends to possess a little more, although not a great deal more, utility to MA-level students and practitioners. They do so in that (1) highly sophisticated statistical analyses and treatments are absent, and (2) authors are usually attempting to present processes for applying development theory in practice.

However, such literature is often plagued by opinion, overgeneralization, and inadequate or inappropriate evaluation techniques which undermine its integrity. As well, many are questionable in their approaches and attempts to bring about truly significant changes in students which can be attributed directly to the intervention techniques employed. One of the more unfortunate and unexpected by-products of such literature is the overzealousness among the unsophisticated who, in order to be developmental, mimic such programs on their campuses with little or no regard for level of understanding or appropriateness of fit. And, I would contend that residence life throughout the country is the scene of an intellectual carnage and a graveyard for an untold number of indiscriminate developmental activity.

The philosophical/essay articles about student development during a 13 year period numbered about 104, according to an analysis by Paul Bloland (1991). Although well-intentioned, they all too often appear to be affirmations of belief and intended to persuade the reader to place trust, to believe unequivocally in the elastic phrase "student development" as a philosophy, goal, central purpose, theory, process or appropriate outcome to the profession's work.

The central criticism of such articles is that in many instances they: (1) are predicated upon a false but unquestioned belief and assumptions about the universality of student development as the raison d etre of student affairs,

(2) defy the rules of logic, and are contaminated with the popular and unintelligible jargon of the moment, (3) assume universal acceptance and applicability of student development advocacies and processes regardless of institutional nature or setting, and (4) too often treat developmental theories as indisputable fact or law, thus seriously diminishing their credulity while misinforming and misleading readers into believing that if they are not being developmental, they are not practicing good student affairs work. Furthermore, they imply that knowledge of developmentalism is hierarchical in our work and those who possess it are superior in educational expertise over those without it. I believe that such a monopoly of knowledge has yet to, and may never, prove its exclusivity.

Texts and Text-Practitioner Books

In the 1940's, when I first came into student affairs work as a residence hall counselor, texts for use in the pioneer student affairs programs were comprised of one or two books, usually written by a single author, were descriptive and somewhat prescriptive in nature, and laced with a healthy dose of educational and Student Personnel Point of View philosophy, (ACE, 1949). The distinguishing features of these texts were that philosophical underpinnings, foundations if you will, were woven carefully and consistently throughout each chapter to provide a sense of cohesiveness and commonality of educational and service purposes across various functions and activities. Educational values were up front as well as serving as an integral part of unit and divisional mission, goals, purpose, and function. And such values, those held appropriate and necessary for student education, and those held necessary for the institution and the larger society were unmistakenly clear.

Possibly, student affairs has grown too large and complex, and possibly too desperate and confusing for a single author to handle adequately these days. But it is interesting to note, that with one exception, not a single text of note, since Williamson (1961) and Mueller (1961) in the same year, has been written by one author. These days one can expect multiple authors, an edited compendium of journal articles, a single author and associates, or one or more authors and a multitude of contributors. With rare exception, nearly all include the term "student development" or "development" in their title, and more often than not, the title, as in the case of our conference program titles contains a colon. Whether directed to practitioners in the editor's preface, we recognize the fact that the real audience for such works are graduate students at the MA level. This is so because (1) no publisher will risk a great deal of capital on a small run and lose money just to serve practitioners in student affairs, who, for the most part, are not renowned as lifelong students of their profession nor as purchasers of professionally related texts, and (2) by expanding the market audience to include graduate students, the publisher and authors improve their chances of breaking even, or at least making some profit.

Contemporary texts and practitioner books can be characterized as possessing chapters on the history of student affairs, inclusive of the student development movement starting in the 1970's; chapters on various human development theories as such are deemed appropriate to college students; chapters on infusing student development theory into the workplace; chapters on legal relationships and discipline as related to developmental outcomes,

chapters on assessment and evaluation of developmental programs and activities, and a smattering of chapters on administrative theory, administration, staffing, staff development, ethical behavior, and challenges or unresolved problems facing the profession. Very apparent to the reader and user of such books is the ubiquitous and imaginative use of the word "development". It appears as a statement of philosophy, theory, process, and outcome. As well, it is used as a noun, adjective and verb. To any outside social or behavioral scientist, our cavalier use of a term held so important to contemporary student affairs work, would be viewed as indicative of a very confused field struggling unsuccessfully and embarrassingly to become a legitimate area of study and profession.

Books written with a dual audience in mind are all too often of little value to the practitioner who, most often, is looking for an overview of functions, administrative organization, staffing, financing, and programming ideas which are simple and easy to administer and evaluate as an "educational activity" (notice I did not say developmental activity). For all practical purposes, the administrator is looking for something easily understood and applicable to the institutional context in which he finds himself, and in form, content and manner that can be easily understood and accepted by a wide variety of audiences. Inclusive within his or her audiences are students, faculty, parents, alumni, the media, legislators, and student affairs, most of whom are not prepared in or prepared for complex psychosocial and cognative developmental theories, and the difficult if not torturous route to their application in the workplace. In this regard, then, I am suggesting that as such texts are directed toward practitioners, generally, we can safely assume that it is doubtful that they will be of widespread use in application to or in changing the general day-to-day practices of the field.

Keeping in mind the characteristics and nature of our typical MA level graduate student, and as one who has been attempting to teach them for the past twenty-four years, I have come to the following understandings:

1 Students agonize in their attempts to reconcile into some kind of consistent and cohesive professional philosophy the textbook mixture of traditional Student Personnel Point of View philosophy (ACE 1949), and the humanistic assumptions, beliefs and advocacies of student development. They praise the precision and clarity of the SPPV and the manner in which student, societal and institutional goals are intermeshed, while simultaneously holding at arm's length the jargon-laden and confusing explanations of student development, which, to them, is a mystique which seems to place process above substance, and form above substance.

2. The literature on developmental theory, seemingly beings with an assumption that graduate students in our field have been reasonably well-schooled in one or more of the behavioral sciences (psychology, sociology, and anthropology) and are or easily will become familiar with theory development, testing and application. As noted earlier, the great majority of our MA level students come from the social sciences, business and the humanities where understanding theory, for the most part, is not essential for academic success. It is no wonder than that students labor with great difficulty to gain even a modicum of understanding of developmental theory.

To compound the frustration stemming from their lack of behavioral science knowledge is the complexity of models and examples for applying developmental theory in practice. Adding further to this problem are the restrictions of most Master's programs which do not provide for minors or cognates in a behavioral science.

3. Given that most Master's students are expected or required to apply student development theory in their assistantship or practicum settings, more often than not they are surrounded by staff and supervisors who are: (a) not familiar with developmental theory, and (b) are in no position to assist the student in its application. And, as we know, the faculty are too occupied with classroom and other tasks to serve as consultants in every student's assistantship or practicum setting to give direction and provide guidance.

Judging by the complexity of program application examples provided in some texts, it is no wonder then that students and young practitioners are more than ready to seek out and function in administratively pragmatic settings while, occasionally giving lip service to student development. The most common complaint I have heard from practitioner and student alike over the past 15 years has been directed toward: the complexity and high degree of sophistication needed for operationalizing student development in the workplace, and the need for simple, multiple models with broad applicability in a variety of institutional settings by relatively unsophisticated staff. As well, and not to be ignored, they seriously question the validity of the theories which have been zealously advocated (Hughey, 1990).

STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LITERATURE

It would seem to me that for our professional literature to be viable, it should be able to pass five tests:

1 It is addressed to and written at the level of practitioners who work most directly with the objects of our field's mission and concerns--in our case, college students--all college students, not just the 17% living on campus who are between 18-22 years of age.

2. It must be written in a manner that is reasonably congruent with the professional preparation, understandings, knowledge, skill levels, and experience of these practitioners.

3. It must take into account the wide variety of types of institutional settings and missions in which these practitioners work.

4. It must be written in easily understood jargon-free concepts and language, and provide for easily adaptable procedures, practices, and programs.

5. It should provide for evaluative methodologies which are not only responsive to the need for improving program effectiveness, but which are easily understood by the practitioners and those who supervise them.

These five tests are necessary conditions if practice is to be affected positively. And, insofar as I am able to discern, much of the student development literature published in the three basic forms over the past fifteen years does not qualify as meeting many, let alone all of these conditions.

NEEDS IGNORED BY THE LITERATURE

I have examined critically that which has been written and published as literature purporting to be "developmental". As well, and of equal if not greater concern is that which the literature has given little attention to, or ignored altogether.

Reinforcing a surface as well as subliminal notion of our field moving us farther and farther away from Brown's "return to the academy" (Brown, 1972), are the professional preparation standards for student affairs (CAS, 1986), and the nature, content, and required experiences of Master's level students.

History and philosophy of higher education are rarely to be found as core courses in such programs, yet they are absolutely essential to understanding the environment and the values which shape and direct pedagogical techniques, and which drive our collegiate institutions and students, the environments in which we work, and the people we are helping in becoming educated. To understand the various theories and philosophies of education which drive the curriculum and institutional vales is fundamental to understanding the basis upon which student affairs can collaboratively work with the faculty in achieving the educational goals of our institutions. Without such understandings student affairs has been and is in a position to only guess and hypothesize, and to remain peripheral to the academic arena, since it ignores and lacks the essential foundations for even initiating serious discussions about collaboration with the faculty.

As well, nowhere in the CAS Standards (1986), or in most of our developmental literature, is the general education curriculum considered worthy of study, or considered for the powerful effect it exerts upon the education and growth of students through the faculty as teachers, and the faculty as role models.

Our literature, our advocacies, our overreaching for near-immediate professional legitimacy and respect as co-equal colleagues of the faculty has thrust us into a posturing and practice as the sole educators (excuse me, developers) of the student's affective, attitudinal, and values development. Justifiably, we can be accused of hubris or vainglorioussness.

I am suggesting that we realize that our developmental emphasis, literature, advocated practices, and behaviors are not congruent with practitioner preparation and receptivity, nor with our field's campus infrastructure and students. And, student development, I contend, will continue to be outside the mainstream until such time that we resuscitate our field with a healthy sense of realism.

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